



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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SPENCE ON KOSOVO:

“THE WRONG COMMITMENT AT THE WRONG TIME FOR THE WRONG REASONS”

During the House of Representative's consideration of a resolution to authorize the deployment of peacekeeping troops to Kosovo (House Concurrent Resolution 42), the Chairman of Armed Services Committee Floyd Spence expressed his opposition to such a deployment in the following extended remarks:

Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my opposition to the deployment of U.S. ground forces into Kosovo and, therefore, opposition to this resolution. As Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, I know that each and every member will support our men and women in uniform whenever and wherever they are called upon to go in harm's way. However, I do not believe that the President has yet made a compelling case for deploying U.S. ground troops to Kosovo. We should all be deeply concerned about the effect that another open-ended commitment of U.S. soldiers in the Balkans will have on a U.S. military that is already under-resourced and dramatically over-extended.

The situation in Kosovo – as tragic as it is – does not directly threaten U.S. security. The United States has no vital national security interest in Kosovo that necessitates the deployment of U.S. ground forces.

The Administration and others suggest that American involvement in Kosovo is in the U.S. national interest because a stable, peaceful Europe is in our interest. This same argument was used to justify the deployment of U.S. forces in Bosnia. Indeed, our presence on the ground in Bosnia for the past three and a half years has not brought stability to the Balkans, nor has it prevented ethnic animosities from escalating in Kosovo, and it has had absolutely no impact on the larger balance of power in Europe.

Yet like Bosnia, we are told a wider war in the Balkans is inevitable if U.S. ground troops are not deployed into Kosovo. At the same time that U.S. ground troops are being rationalized as necessary to prevent a wider war, we are also being told that U.S. ground troops will only deploy to Kosovo if a peace agreement is reached and that our troops will withdraw if fighting resumes. Secretary of State Albright has been clear on this point. However, it makes no sense to assert that it is in our national interest to keep the conflict from spreading, while at the same time asserting that we will only participate in the peacekeeping mission if there is no risk of the conflict spreading.

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As in Bosnia, we are being told that the Kosovo crisis threatens the credibility of the NATO alliance and America's leadership in Europe. Yet nothing may so damage the credibility of the alliance – and America's leadership of it – than involvement in an open-ended military operation that lacks a clear end state. In Kosovo, there is no exit strategy, and any "interim settlement" is likely to encourage, not dampen, the drive for independence by the Albanian Kosovars, which will only create more problems.

Finally, it is important for us to consider means as well as ends in making strategic decisions. As in Bosnia, we are told that peace in Kosovo requires the presence of U.S. ground troops. But the severe reductions in American ground forces of recent years, along with the already demanding pace of operations not only in Bosnia but around the globe, greatly compound the costs and implications of a Kosovo deployment.

Writing about Kosovo, Henry Kissinger recently stated, "leadership should not be interpreted to mean that we must do everything ourselves." If the United States must participate in a NATO peacekeeping effort in Kosovo, there are other alternatives that do not require the deployment of thousands of ground troops. The United States has unique military capabilities that it can and should contribute to the peacekeeping effort, including the provision of intelligence, air support, logistics and communications.

In fact, the United States is already heavily invested in the Balkan peace effort. Some 7,000 U.S. troops are currently deployed in Bosnia and neighboring countries in support of a multinational peacekeeping effort. The costs of operations in and around the former Yugoslavia have already cost the Department of Defense almost \$10 billion through the current fiscal year. The deployment of U.S. ground forces in Kosovo would, according to the Department of Defense, cost an additional \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion each year. The indirect costs will be much higher.

In sum, Mr. Speaker, the case to deploy ground troops to Kosovo has not been made. Although our troops deserve and will get nothing less than our full support wherever they are deployed, I cannot support this open-ended resolution authorizing an open-ended commitment in Kosovo. It is the wrong commitment at the wrong time and for the wrong reasons.

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